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ABSTRACT

This paper observes that Americans, although they broadly and vocally resist informational censorship in the schools even for children, waffle in their efforts to eliminate the powerful and sometimes offensive cultural artifacts of popular "teen culture" from school curriculums. Potent economic and political forces, however, conspire to thwart parental attempts to limit curricular choice. Framing the argument is the example of Tipper Gore's polite national campaign to eliminate inappropriate curricular materials, disguising the word "censorship" with "choice" in order to prevent the vendors of immoral informational goods and services from complaining about First Amendment infringements and placate liberal parents opposed to any form of censorship. The apparent inconsistency in our curricular policies regarding censorship is firmly rooted in the "principle of exceptionality." This philosophy aggrandizes this Nation's extends constitutional guarantees, despite their occasional harmful consequences, beyond the purposes of citizen protection for which they were originally intended. This paper concludes that some censorship is necessary in order to protect our impressionable and vulnerable young from exploitative and potentially harmful information and that the quixotic elements in the current anticensorship policies must be rejected. (JAM)

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Why Americans Can't Handle Censorship (Even for Children)

A Paper Presented at the 1988 Annual Meeting of the

American Education Research Association

New Orleans, Lousiana

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In an earlier article (Wynne, 1986), I argued that most serious people--regardless of their ideological positions--were sympathetic to the idea of censoring certain material to "protect" young readers. And body of evidence was presented to support this contention. A copy of that article is appended to this paper. The evidence in the article identified a variety of actual situations, where persons of diverse ideological stripes attempted to censor certain information or arguments from being put before an audience, in general,and young audiences, in particular. Many of the censorship situations involved schools, and school curriculum. However, the underlying principles were obviously applicable to a broad range of events affecting children and adolescents. Whatever the locations of such incidents, the persons proposing the restrictions implicitly, and even explicitly, argued that they were opposed to "censorship."

The article also included a relatively through discussion of different definitions of the term censorship. Among the alternative definitions was one which called "censorship" any deliberate effort to restrict the information or arguments made available to others-- even if the "others" were children or adolescents. It is evident that, at this time, this relatively broad definition of censorship is the one most typically now used in American public discourse. The article tacitly posed an important and anomalous question: If almost everybody is implicitly in favor of censorship, why is it there is such broadcast resistance to censorship of many materials made available to young persons?

An Example

A typical instance of such inconsistency is found in the public positions taken by prominent people regarding about the socalled "sexploitation industry"--for example, movies directed at youth audiences, and featuring "teen slashers," depicting "the killing, torture and sexual mutilation of women in sickening detail" (Gore, 1988). It will be constructive to examine some of the controversies affecting this topic. They are a concrete instance of the inconsistencies I have already identified. From that examination, we can derive some general principles which affect a variety of youth environments, including our schools.

Tipper Gore, the wife of Sen. Albert Gore (at this moment, a candidate for the Democratic presidental nomination) has been a prominent leader in the effort to stimulate public criticism and resistance to such sexploitation trends.She has written a book describing the situation, and specifying her objections--and those of many other parents (Gore,1987). She has also helped to found a national organization directed at fostering such efforts.

Her general activisim is understandable, and presumably constructive. There are comparatively few people in the country who are sympathetic to "rock groups who simulate sexual torture and murder during live preformances," or "tapes with sado-masochistic rock lyrics" (Gore,1988). However,the irony is that,despite her justifiable indignation, Ms. Gore concludes that she has no desire to "cast a 'chill' over popular culture," and that she favors "choice, not censorship."

As a result of such notable qualifications,the operational recommendations she proposes are relatively limited. Parents should pay close attention to what their children are doing and try and monitor their media choices; and systems for more clearly labelling various media materials should be developed and applied. And, just possibly, we should also conclude that sado-masochistic movies and tapes are bad for kids--though heaven forbid we "cast a 'chill' over popular culture." It is not hard to identify the many deficiencies in Ms. Gore's truly modest proposals. It is extremely difficult for parents to keep in close touch with childrens and adolescents media choices. How do two parent working families engage in such monitoring during the daytime? How do parents monitor their children when the children visit the homes of their peers? How are older children monitored when parents are away from home during the evening? None of these questions mean that parents can't exercise some control over their children, even when they are out of their parents' sight. But one must recognize that parental control inevitably diminishes significantly in such common situations.

The notorious fact is that America has a powerful "teen culture," and "youth market." The ability of individual families to monitor their children is significantly constrained by the such factors. And we must give Mrs. Gore credit, and assume she recognizes these realities. In other words, we know that she knows that, without some system of "repression"--and I use the word advisedly--the sexploitation she properly deplores will continue to have a distressing effect on many young persons. But she has obdurately refused to take a public position in favor of what I call "censorship."

Ms. Gore's position is a typical instance of the phenomena I identified in my earlier article: a person who does--or should-- favor censorship, but who obdurately objects to such conduct,or the sympathetic application of the term. Why does she persist in such anomalous conduct? And we must recognize that the question is not merely theoretical, or abstract. For, if censorship is the logical solution to some severe problem, and people are unwilling to urge it, public debate may become sterile, and unrealistic 'solutions' pursued.

Mixed Motives

As in the case of most human conduct, Ms.Gore probably has a variety of motives for her refusal to bite the bullet. One "motive" may be the influence, on she and her husband, of economic and political forces. And this motive was directly considered in my earlier article. There, I observed that many Americans and American institutions have important economic and professional interests in resisting censorship--or, to put it more critically, in exploiting young people in order to make lots of money.

The print media prominently reported a meeting in Los Angles between Ms. Gore and her husband, and leading members of the media industry. The articles noted that many prominent media figures were involved in Democratic politics, and often contributed generously to election campaigns. The meeting was supposedly an occasion for Ms. Gore to reassure such persons that she was opposed to "censorship," and foster a general exchange of ideas among those present. Some persons at the meeting undoubtedly voiced their anti-censorship arguments through objections to the "chilling of popular culture"--the phrase is surely a lovely euphemism for licensing sado-machoism.

The nub of the matter is that selling immoral goods and services can often be very profitable. In an open society, it is certain that such profits will enable the vendors to generate various forms of influence. The influence can range from hiring competent and vigorous lawyers to harass objectors, to focussing campaign contributions, and other diverse types of assertion. The Gores' Los Angles meeting is simply one of a number of plausible examples of such efficacy.

But it would wrong for readers to infer that I believe economic pressure is probably the main reason for Ms. Gore's moderation--or for the many other instances of such waffling about this topic which affect our society. Economic pressure is not irrelevant, whether it is from textbook publishers or rock group promoters. And,for some persons, it is undoubtedly the major force. But, for many other persons who object to certain materials put before the young, there are enormous intellectual inhibitions about frankly defending the concept of censorship--even though censorship, as I have defined the word, is the logical response to the problems they describe.

The more basic cause for such inhibitions is the profound hostility of most Americans to the concept of censorship, per se (see, e.g., Donelson, 1987). We are inherently critical of the idea of keeping information from other people (even for their "own good"). In my earlier article, I pointed out the historical and philosophical anomaly of this position. It is true that many philosophic authorities are sympathetic to the free flow of information. However, most (or all?) of them, up until the recent past, assumed that particular restrictions would be placed around children and adolescents. In effect, the basic American hostility towards censorship regarding adults has

comparatively recently been extended to also apply to children. The current "popular" American position is historically unique. And, while I have not conducted a survey of contemporary foreign circumstances, it is my impression that our current philosophy and practices are also unique among contemporary nations. This does not mean that in most or all other contemporary societies, the young are effectively excluded, by censorship, from all harmful and exploitive forces. There have always been Pied Pipers, who who attempt to exploit the vulnerability of the young in a variety of ways. Furthermore, there are often practical difficulties involved in keeping young people away from exposure to different adult deviations. But, whatever the patterns elsewhere, it seems unlikely that serious authorities outside of America try to justify such occasional exposure on the basis of avoiding censorship.

It should also be observed that, in many historical and contemporary situations, the idea of censorship to protect the young was positioned in a slightly different framework than in America in our era. The subject matter which was kept from the young varied among different cultures.

Thus, among the Amerindians of the Northeastern woodlands, torturing captives was quite common. This was a form of sadism. One practice was to have captives run a gauntlet--two long files of Indians, who vigorously beat that captives as they tried to run to a the point of safety in the middle of the village (Van Der Buts, 1973). It seems likely that children dwelling in such villages were quite familiar with this form of recreation, and that their exposure to this knowledge did not bother adults. On the other hand, the same villages often had various secret adult societies, who's practices were rigorously concealed from children.

In other words,the particular elements of adult life concealed from children have varied among societies; but it is hard to imagine a society without some "secrets" it deems worthy of such protection, in the interest of both society and the children. The remarkable thing about the current American situation is that, while it is recognized by most adults that there are certain things that should be kept from children and adolescents, we do not seem willing to enforce our wishes.

The Issue is Exceptionality

The French sociologist Michael Crozier, in an impressionistic review of American culture,gave great weight to the concept of "exceptionality" (Crozier, 1984). The word relates to the explicit and implicit American presumption that rules derived from history and cross cultural perspectives do not relate to our society. We are unique. Due to such uniqueness, we are licensed to develop and apply new and original principles of government.

Crozier, and other authorities who have dealt with the concept of exceptionality, have recognized that there are important, relatively novel elements in the American experience. We are the world's largest and longest persisting constitutional democracy. Our country is the most successful example of the blending of many diverse ethnic groups. We have never maintained an overseas empire, in the sense that such empires were maintained by the major European powers. Our mainland has never been successfully attacked by a foreign enemy. And so on. All of these historic facts may be cited to justify the position that the typical "laws of history" are not applicable to the American experience.

The principle of exceptionality has much to do with our current policies regarding censorship and the young. It seems the best explanation why people vigorously hold to a position ridden with intellectual inconsistency,and which is not supported by either notable historic or cross cultural precedents. Furthermore, it helps to explain why the contentions against censorship have somewhat prevailed, in the face of remarkable evidence of growing alienation and disorder among our young (Uhlenberg & Eggbeen, 1986; Wynne & Hess, 1986). Only a belief founded on a quasi-religious faith could persist in the face of such increasing disjunction with reality and logic.

Like all quasi-religious beliefs, the resistance to censorship has been protected by elaborate forms of denial. Thus, about ten years back, a controversy arose in Kanawha County, West Virginia, about the books which should be part of the public school curriculum (Trillin, 1974; Young, 1974). Almost all of the national media spoke out in criticism of the book censors.

The real meaning of the controversy became evident to me when one of the parents' defenders noted that none of the media involved dared to publish any excerpts from the banned books--because the materials were too scurrilous! (For evidence on this point, see the discussion about Soul on Ice in the article in the appendix.) In other words, the print media, largely directed towards adult readers, refused to publish certain material--as too crude and uncouth-- which they then prescribed, over parental resistance, as appropriate for high school students.

All of this is quite consistent with the principle of exceptionality. Many American have apparently adopted the belief that our country is exempt from the general laws governing human society. Such a belief generates a number of

pleasant effects. The rejection of censorship to protect the young seems to be one of our instances of exceptionality. Because of this rejection, we do not have to engage in the cumbersome process of applying censorship in the environments surrounding our young. Of course, our failure to practice such censorship generates a variety of distressing consequences, e.g., we have to tolerate institutions which get rich selling sado-machoism to the young, and the diverse effects generated by such vital salesmanship. But human beings have remarkable capabilities to "defend" central emotional values like exceptionality. Denial, projection and a variety of other psychological mechanisms can be mobilized for such purposes. These mechanisms have enormous power to mask and distort reality.

Some Proposals

We are a fortunate country. The intellectual and moral problems generated by our assumption of exceptionality are the converse side of a precious blessing: in many ways, our history has been relatively exceptional and benign. But it would be a fallacy to assume that exceptionality can persist indefinitely. Powerful general principles will eventually make their force and consequences known.

It is time for America to look more seriously at the environments around our young. We must recognize that the disorder we permit in such environments is generating excessively harmful consequences. This may be especially true as we move towards an era where each youth or young adult will have an increasing proportion of elderly persons to support. It is in the interest of us all that we imbue our future generations with competence and diligence.

The first proposition is that we should reject the quixotic elements in our current anti-censorship policies,and strive to remedy that situation. Such rejection can occur in a number of institutions: in our courts, our legislative bodies, our law enforcement agencies, our schools and even our child-protective organizations, where able and well-intentioned persons, such as Ms. Gore, still reflexively object to censorship to protect the young.

As and if such rejection spreads, a variety of measures can be applied. We can invent different forms of legal constraints upon persons who peddle the virtues of evil and sado-machism to the young. Perhaps we can create tort liability, on behalf of children (or their parents) who are apparently injured by such salesmanship. Or a variety of local, state and national criminal penalties can be developed. Ms. Gore to the contrary, the aim, quite frankly, should be to "chill popular culture," at least insomuch as that culture--or the people who make millions creating it--try to tempt and seduce the young.

In education, a variety of relevant measures can be identified. Many of them are directly outlined in my article in the appendix. But all of them are founded on the explicit acceptance of some form of censorship to protect the young.

The struggles now underway about censorship and the young will persist for the lifetimes of all of the readers of this piece. All wholesome answers to these issues represent forms of compromise. Furthermore, our "answers" must interact with dynamic technologies, which multiply the attractions and presentations which can be directed at the young. But despite such persisting problems, the pro-censorship forces are engaged in an important, and long-valued struggle on behalf of vulnerable persons. Furthermore, the struggle will

inevitably have its implications for the nature of our future generations. It is an effort well worth carrying forward.

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The Case for Censorship to Protect the Young

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The traditional definition of censorship, as derived from classic authorities such as Mill, Milton, and Jefferson, is the deliberate, broadcast government suppression of offending writings or spoken words. In America, the sense of this definition is embodied in the First Amendment of the Constitution. In the past 50 years, the traditional definition has been expanded in scope.

The spirit of the expansion is expressed in the changes in First Amendment litigation. In 1933, one important First Amendment case prohibited the federal government from preventing any adults from bringing into the United States copies of *Ulysses* which they had purchased in Europe.[1] By the late 1970s, some cases involved the right of local school boards to refuse to keep copies of books such as *Soul on Ice* for reading by 14-year-olds. The expanded definition has generated remarkable problems for courts, educators, and thoughtful analysts. The new definition of censorship constitutes a break with the past for two reasons. It goes beyond indicting governmental broadcast prohibition, obligating the government to engage in affirmative action and/or cease acts of only limited prohibition. It also extends the classical right to receive information to include children and adolescents. There is little or no evidence that traditional thinkers had such an intent. Their concerns were with the right of information for adult readers and listeners.

Applying Restraints

The tacit expansion of the traditional definition of censorship has resulted in many difficulties. Some of these difficulties will be more evident if we consider the following examples involving restraining writings or speech.

> *Item*: A careful *New Yorker* article by Frances FitzGerald discussed the matter of school library censorship and the details of a particular incident in a Maine school district.[2] The Maine episode culminated in a federal court case in-

volving *365 Days*, a Vietnam War account by a doctor in a military hospital.[3] The article noted that the federal judge prohibited persons participating in the trial from uttering a word used frequently in the book. The *New Yorker* article did not use the word. The silence in the article was advertent. The word surely was "fuck."

Item: The Island Pines School Board on Long Island removed a number of books from the shelves of its high school library due to community protests. Among those books was *Soul on Ice*.[4] Eventually, a U.S. Supreme Court majority gave qualified approval to the board's decision.[5] But, the "qualification" meant the district had to go back to a lower court and establish that it had "legitimate" motives for removing the books. The district then dropped the case and left the books on the shelves. It is possible that the costs of litigation discouraged further action.

Neither the Federal District Court, where the *Island Pines* case was first tried, the Federal Court of Appeals, where the decision was reviewed, nor the majority in the Supreme Court, quoted any material from the "offending" books. The FitzGerald article, which also discussed the *Island Pines* case, provided no quotes. However, one dissenting Supreme Court judge, who believed that the prohibition should be sustained, did include some quotations from the books in his dissent. The *Soul on Ice* quote ran as follows:

> There are white men who will pay you to fuck their wives. They approach you and say, "How would you like to fuck a white woman?" "What is this?" you ask. "On the up-and-up," he assures you. "It's all right. She's my wife. She needs black rod, that's all. She has to have it. It's like a medicine or drug to her. She has to have it. I'll pay you. It's all on the level, no trick involved. Interested?" You go with him and he drives you to their home. The three of you go into the bedroom. There is a certain type who will leave you and his wife alone and tell you to pile her real good. After it is all over, he will pay you and drive you to wherever you want to go. Then there are some who like to peep at you through a keyhole and watch you have his woman, or peep at you through a window, or lie under the bed and listen to the creaking of the bed as you work out. There is another type who likes to masturbate while he stands beside the bed and watches you pile her. There is the type who

> likes to eat his woman up after you get through piling her. And there is the type who only wants you to pile her for a little while, just long enough to thaw her out and kick her motor over and arouse her to heat, then he wants you to jump off real quick and he will jump onto her and together they can make it from there by themselves.[6]

When I read parts of the *Soul on Ice* text aloud in a class to my graduate students—average age in the late twenties—I could see their jaws drop. I wonder what would we think of parents who gave such a book to their 14-year-old child as a present?

> *Item*: Our eight-year-old son was invited to attend a young authors' conference sponsored by our school system. There was a separate section for parents' activities. The parents were addressed by a writer who wrote children's books, and served as editorial advisor to a children's book publisher. One parent asked the speaker for her feelings about children reading classics. She said, "I feel some of them are appropriate, but there are many others which I would not recommend being republished, since their perspective is not wholesome for contemporary children." From the speaker's other remarks, it was evident that "perspective" referred to matters such as male and female roles portrayed, minority issues, and the like. Somewhat later in her presentation, the speaker decried the practice of censorship which, she said, afflicted many school libraries.
>
> *Item*: Margot Zemach has won numerous awards for many children's books. In 1982, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux published *Jake and Honeybunch Go to Heaven*. The book was derived from black American folklore, circa 1900 through about 1940. It received 14 positive reviews. *The New York Times* also cited it as one of the 16 best children's books of 1982. There were also four negative reviews. The critical reviews did not object to the book's lovely illustrations. Furthermore, they did not directly contradict the proposition that the book portrayed, in an affectionate and intriguing fashion, the black folklore view of the after-life during a particular era. However, a number of librarians objected to buying or using the book. The acquisition committee of the Chicago Public Library offered the following explanation for its negative decision:

> One librarian, who is black, works in a predominantly black neighborhood, wants to purchase the book, and took it to her minister. He felt the book was positive and a good story. Even after hearing this opinion, the group felt that the book's interpretation of a black heaven would offend many people and that it reinforced many stereotypes that are not offset by a wealth of children's literature portraying the black experience.
>
> "I, too, feel strongly that this book presents a selection dilemma for most librarians. We have decided to restrict purchase to our central and two regional libraries, which collect at a research level."[7]

It does not appear that the Chicago Public Library acquisition committee made any reference to the American Library Association Council's *Library Bill of Rights*.[8] The *Bill* provides that, "Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be prescribed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval." Neither of the two published reports on the *Jake and Honeybunch* incident suggested that any formal professional criticisms were levied at the conduct of the excluding libraries. The national office of the American Library Association is in Chicago.

Defining Censorship

These items reveal the universal human propensity to restrain and sort the information and statements we allow, authorize, or disseminate, and to regard certain ideas or remarks as good or bad. There is no more reason to decry this propensity than to bemoan the fact that we must breathe air.

Originally, the word censorship derived from the office of "censor," an official in the Roman State. The Roman Censors (there were typically two of them) were expected to use their authority to sustain public morals, and restrict and criticize certain forms of public misconduct. It is not surprising that the practices of the Roman Censors are widely mimicked in our era. Unfortunately, our modern censors have more power and less responsibility than their Roman counterparts, since many of their practices are covert and unchecked.

The four items show contemporary citizens as "censors," even as they decry censorship. They approve the constraining of certain forms of expression and the transmission of particular concepts in jurisdictions under their authority. Some of the constraints are justified as the suppression of "vulgarity"—such as keeping the word "fuck" out of courtrooms

or magazines. But when schools try to keep books using the same word from their libraries, courts prohibit them from engaging in censorship. The *New Yorker* article supports the judge's prohibitions. The speaker at the conference decries censorship, but discourages publishers from reprinting classics. The librarians, despite the judgment of the black minister, refuse to make a well-recognized book available to children. No one involved in the *Jake and Honeybunch* controversy seems willing to accuse the librarians involved of practicing censorship.

Modern censorship is more harmful than the practices of the Roman Censors, because of the prevalence of tacit censorship in our era. The Roman Censors admitted the obvious purpose and intent of their acts. They were publicly accountable. Their conduct could be studied, analyzed, and directly discussed and evaluated. Too many modern censors lack the judgment or integrity to recognize the purpose and effect of their conduct.

It is arguable that neither Mill, Milton, nor Jefferson would characterize the incidents described as wrongful censorship. Some of the acts originated not with governments, but with individual citizens or private corporations. None of the government acts completely prohibited the circulation of the materials. They merely withdrew them from certain systems of distribution. Most of the acts affected young persons, and not adults. Undoubtedly, traditional anti-censorship philosophers would cede authority to judges and publishers on matters of taste, notwithstanding explicit and implicit inconsistencies. The one consistent principle seems to be: If "you" suppress information or ideas I like, it is censorship, but if I do it, it represents the application of good taste or the assertion of judicious priorities.

Any serious discussion of censorship must present a definition of censorship which can be applied with predictability and is more than an expression of individual whims or taste. There are three possible definitions which meet a test of intellectual consistency. Each raises significant problems and provides us with opportunities. Ironically, as we will see, the three definitions have certain parallel effects.

Three Definitions

The first consistent definition is the classical one—broadcast government prohibitions and restrain public availability of information to adults. Under this definition, most incidents affecting schools deal neither with censorship nor the First Amendment. The incidents rarely restrict out-of-school information. And the restraints usually apply only to children and adolescents.

This definition obviously conflicts with some current First Amendment trends. The definition justifies information constraints around the young, but does not apply raw prohibitions routinely. That would constitute poor pedagogy. It simply means that decisions about information and the young should be matters of public policy, not to be treated as First Amendment issues. They should not be decided by judges and subjected to the cumbersome machinery of litigation.

A second alternative definition would treat as censorship all unreasonable government efforts to apply personal values in deciding what information or learning materials should be available to the young.

This definition has certain virtues. We all agree that some restraints on information are appropriate. Under this definition, the use of restraints would require deliberate, thoughtful decisions to be made and justified. Presumably, such decisions would be subject to court review. One test of "unreasonableness" would be the practices applied by the anti-censors in making their own dissemination decisions. For example, an editor who discourages publishers from publishing "sexist" books would be poorly qualified to charge school boards with censorship because they choose not to buy *Soul on Ice*. Despite the problems, this definition represents the course towards which we are tending. It has some intellectual consistency, but could lead to a morass of litigation.

A third alternative definition would define all forms of information control around the young as censorship, but would license educators to make choices, based on formal criteria, among different curriculum materials. Though such choices would keep out certain materials, they would not constitute censorship, but the exercise of professional judgment. By definition, acts of censorship would be judicially prohibited. Judges rather than professionals would have to decide when censorship had occurred.

I do not believe that a distinction between censorship and professional choice is useful. Almost all professional decisions about literature, curriculum, library materials and the like involve matters of choice. Students have limited time, schools have finite budgets, and an infinite body of curriculum materials exists. And, as the items suggest, people seldom think that they engage in censorship. Thus, the whole issue of what is legitimate professional choice either drifts into litigation or is practiced at a covert level.

Let me summarily characterize the diverse definitions just presented. All of them explicitly recognize the need for screening and for adult control. In these respects, they are constructive. However, each offers different justifications for control. The first definition proceeds on an assumption

that it is naturally proper for accountable adults to apply such control; the second, that adults can apply reasonable control, subject to court review; the third, that professionals can freely apply professional judgments, unless courts decide that they are prejudicial rather than professional.

The first definition seems to me to be most useful. It takes the matter of educational decisions out of the hands of courts—cumbersome instruments at best. It does not confuse value judgments with professional expertise. It means that decisions should be subject to representative community norms rather than judicial or professional constraints. Both the judicial and professional decisions of the recent past, and the forms of such processes, do not inspire great confidence.

All three proposed definitions proceed on the assumption that information made available to the young by the State may be restricted. According to one definition, such restrictive decisions would simply become policy decisions. In another definition, a well-argued defense of reasonableness would allow courts to permit censorship. In the third, courts would not intervene if decisions were choices made by competent professionals. All three definitions require some consistent rationale for restricting the information. What principles should be applied in making such restrictions?

Children and Adolescents Are Unique

Children and adolescents are incompletely developed human beings, requiring protections not applied to adults. Because of this incompleteness, they should not have the same freedom of choice as adults. Hence, it is justifiable to restrict their rights regarding alcohol use, prohibit them from accepting certain types of employment, or require them to attend school against their will. Similarly, it is right for us to restrict their choices among media materials or prohibit self-seeking adults from selling (or trying to sell them) certain such materials. Regardless of the freedom we may proffer to adults regarding media, it is proper to provide children and adolescents with less.[9] This traditional argument for censorship has lost some vitality in our era. As a predictable result, some authorities argue that children and adolescents are being seriously harmed—a consequence of our failure to protect them from the tensions of premature adulthood.[10]

Restriction is also appropriate because children and adolescents are peculiarly engaged in "learning." It is true that humans can and do learn throughout their lives. Still, it is evident that most learning occurs, or should occur, during the younger years. Efficient learning requires concentration and focus. If the learner is afflicted by too many stimuli, he or she will not be able to form material into congruent concepts. Thus, we re-

quire silence in libraries, suppress disorder in classrooms, and otherwise try to present learners with properly structured information. In a general sense, similar principles should govern children's exposure to the media. They should not be exposed to too many incongruent stimuli. Psychologically speaking, forms of restriction applied around children should recognize their developmental levels. Distinctions can be established about age-appropriate materials. Sometimes, maintaining such distinctions causes administrative problems in schools. In such instances, it would be helpful to ask whether constraining some older children from having a book (to "protect" the younger ones) unreasonably restricts the choice of the older, or whether we can expect the older children to obtain that book easily elsewhere—say at their public library or by their parents making a purchase.

The acceptance of these principles leaves many questions unsettled. But it leads to the issues of how, why, and what should be restricted, rather than denying the logic and necessity of restricting information.

Media Affect Conduct

We should assume that books, and other media materials, help shape the conduct of children and adolescents in important ways. On one hand, the assumption seems trite. What is the sense of having courses in literature, showing children movies, and otherwise "pushing" media on children, if we don't believe that such materials make any difference in what they do? Of course books and other literature help to shape people!

On the other hand, as Al Smith said, "I never saw a lady who was raped by a book!" And he used this argument to oppose some proposed censorship law. Furthermore, on a more "scientific" level, there is little hard evidence as to whether, and how much, human conduct is shaped by literature and other media. The lack of evidence is one of the arguments used against censorship—although there seems no point in opposing restrictions if we really believe that books make no difference.[11]

Speaking as a researcher, I can summarily say that doing rigorous research about the effects of media on conduct—especially things like the potential effect on a 14-year-old of reading *Soul on Ice*—is extraordinarily difficult. Many parents would not consent to such a study. Or once the children knew its reading was labeled "research," much of the realism of the study would evaporate. Furthermore, most of us assume that the "bad" effects of media are cumulative, occurring incrementally over long periods of time. Finally, children who are frequently exposed to "bad" or "good" literature are probably living in environments which are otherwise con-

gruent with bad or good outcomes. Thus, segregating the potential causes can be extremely difficult. None of this is to say that such research is impossible or entirely unprofitable. But, until we get much better quality research than we now have, I propose we take the (alleged) anti-censors on their own premises. We should assume that books and like materials can produce important effects on conduct. Or, alternatively, we can suggest that we should stop spending money on such inconsequential materials.

Imperfect Restrictions Can Still Be Efficacious

The argument is often made that restrictions are inappropriate, since children can still obtain the prohibited material elsewhere, in bookstores, public libraries, from their peers, or via street conversations and observations. The general principle is true: Systems of restriction are imperfect, especially in our open society. But these facts are no cause for educators to abandon restrictions.

After all, crimes occur, and we maintain systems of punishment since they may have *some* deterrent effect. There is always some air pollution, but we try to diminish it. Imperfect controls are better than no controls. On matters of information, we should increase the opportunity costs for children to acquire certain materials and for adults to make them available.

The more important reason for restrictions is that they constitute a form of adult judgment about what is good for the young. Adolescent cynicism to the contrary, many young people are favorably affected by the sincere judgments and concerns of responsible adults. Indeed, adults make many such constraining judgments, some of them legally, as with norms regarding sexual intercourse, matters relating to drinking, automobile driving, the obligations of school attendance, and the like. There is also a relatively high level of child and adolescent support for the more restrictive policies. Of course, the policies are sometimes violated by some young people. If adults abolished age limits affecting youth drinking or made driving licenses irrelevant, however, my gut speculation is that the level of youth compliance with such principles would decline. In other words, thoughtful, clearly stated adult prohibitions affecting the young often win high levels of youth compliance. Similarly, in the case of restricted books and the like, we should assume that there will be a general disposition among many children and adolescents to accept such decisions, especially if they are clearly made and frankly defended. Essentially, the defense would be, "You are not ready for this *yet*. If you choose to read it later, when you are older, you will have that right."

Great Literature Has Special License

When making restriction decisions, we should be prepared to give special license to important literature. One element which defines such literature is that it has stood the test of time. This is not to say that such literature never has objectionable material, or that no restraints should be applied. But, in important literature, objectionable material—almost by definition—is presented as part of a sensitive, holistic portrayal of significant human experiences. When placed in that context, questionable materials lose some of their harmful effects.

We also have to recognize that schools have an obligation to transmit the traditions of our culture. To deprive children of such experiences, because of so-called censorable flaws, is to make a serious decision. Furthermore, the matter of restrictions should be approached with a certain degree of humility. Assume that many generations have viewed something as a significant work of literature—appropriate for children—and "we" deem it inappropriate because of the values of our era. Our deviance from past criteria should cause us to question our own criteria instead of simplistically rejecting the conclusions of previous generations.

The practical ramifications of such principles are disclosed in an article by the former president of the California State Board of Education on textbook selection. He observed that extracts from traditional literature in contemporary textbooks had been highly circumscribed. Recent California state regulations require that books contain "no demeaning labels or role stereotypes, equal representations of males and females in occupations, societal contributions, and physical activities, and representation of older and disabled persons . . . [Many textbooks were cited an non-complying, and rejected]. As publishers began to show such things as females operating jackhammers and steam shovels, the number of citations dropped."[12] Presumably, another thing that was "dropped" (from the textbooks) was 95 percent of the literature written before 1975.

Many Opponents of Censorship Are Highly Self-Interested

The preceding analysis implies that the pros and cons of censorship should and will be decided on purely rational grounds—removed from matters of self-interest. That implication is misleading. We should directly recognize that many defenders of our current, inconsistent definition of censorship are not disinterested intellectuals. In effect, the current definition protects and advances new literature and materials (through defending them against alleged censorship), and excludes old or traditional materials (without admitting such exclusion is censorship). Perhaps the intellectual

inconsistency involved is sustained by partly economic motives. After all, one does not need to be a Marxist to recognize that intellectual positions can be affected by simple self-interest.

Many anti-censors are persons or institutions who compose for, buy, produce, sell, or use media materials. They are authors, publishers, booksellers, and librarians. Each of these classes of people, in addition to their aesthetic concerns, has economic and personal reasons for opposing restrictions on literature. These reasons have little or nothing to do with the welfare of children and adolescents. Indeed, in some cases, it is likely that the economic motives of these producers and users might be in conflict with the welfare of children.

People who write, create, or compose for the media, or who produce materials, are obviously interested in having their products produced and sold on a large scale. Titillating materials are often created by people of little talent, and are oftentimes attractive to persons with unformed tastes (e.g., children and adolescents). Some Americans are prepared to view media composers as artists with exalted, non-material motives. But all of us recognize the normal commercial motives of media producers and vendors.

The matter of media buyers such as librarians is slightly different. A conversation I had with a library acquisitions manager was enlightening. She was highly critical of "censorship." She partly opposed it "on principle." But she also opposed it because it would make her work harder and complicate her responsibilities. Her annual job was to spend X dollars to buy Y number of books, and she had certain systems for determining which books to buy. Her decisions were based on who published or wrote books, or on the use of summary critiques. When I talked about the library's responsibility to children and parents, she saw her potential responsibility as censor as a great encumbrance to her present role. It would also probably lead to a lowered budget, because it would slow down the rate of acquisition. As for teachers and other adult users of censorable materials, one can often recognize their good intentions. But it is evident that many teachers may see their jobs as simplified—and less arduous—if they do not have to assess the appropriateness of the media they use in the light of censorship criteria.

We must also consider the market concept of forced obsolescence. We know what that means about commodities like automobiles or fashionable clothes. Producers try to develop a market environment where consumers are encouraged to buy new and different goods largely because the earlier products are seen as "out of fashion." The earlier products may still be

materially satisfying—the old car may still run fairly well, last year's garments may still keep us warm and dry. But we really know that producers and advertisers work hard to stimulate new demands. A similar phenomenon may apply in the area of children's literature.

The sale of literary classics does not earn money for contemporary authors, nor does it stimulate libraries to buy many more books or enlarge their budgets. From the point of view of publishers, authors, and some library administrators, forced obsolescence is a good policy to apply to children's literature. In effect, such a policy is now operating. As the preceding discussion shows, the sale of many children's classics is often deliberately suppressed—allegedly due to their stereotypical or psychologically unsound approaches. Furthermore, each year a myriad of prizes is awarded for diverse categories of newly published children's books—the Caldecott Medal, the Newberry Prize, the Hans Christian Anderson Award. Issuing such prizes stimulates librarians and parents to look favorably towards new books, and encourages authors to pursue different (and faddish?) themes.

Operational Implications

The principles just discussed do not tell teachers or administrators exactly how to be "reasonable," but operational approaches can be derived from them.

Decisions about what media resources to buy are sometimes significant and sometimes inconsequential. Where purchasing decisions reflect moral or intellectual biases, they should be collective decisions.[13] Parents or parent representatives (school board members) should have significant input in the decision-making process. With older students, it might be proper to solicit their *advice*. Undue weight should not be given to novelty, and the classic status of a piece should entitle it to more sympathetic consideration. In cases where literature is acceptable but controversial, efforts should be made to provide pupils with appropriate help as they interpret a particular piece. Where possible, decisions should be made at the administrative level closest to parents such as the individual school.

When media decisions relate to an elective course (at the high school level), more sensitive materials may be presented, especially if parents are given a realistic opportunity to prevent their children from attending such classes. By "realistic" I mean parents can make timely and informed decisions that will not inflict *notable* stigma on their children. On the other hand, there is nothing wrong with children incrementally learning that their family and their traditions are not the same as everyone else's and

that their choices are, therefore, circumscribed. Maturing partly means learning the ways in which one is different from others. It sometimes means resisting peer pressures, to respond to parental and adult values.

It may be helpful to translate some of the preceding generalities into specifics. Take the novel *Huckleberry Finn* as an instance. The book uses the now vulgar and offensive word "nigger" over two hundred times. It warmly and imaginatively portrays an era in American history and, incidentally, reveals a developing relationship between the vagabond Huck and the black slave Jim. Many parents and educators might conclude that it would be an important and constructive book for high school juniors or seniors to read as an assignment. It would be desirable to supplement such an assignment with in-class discussion about the current connotations of the word "nigger," and its implications in the period portrayed in the book and for the author. If a small proportion of the parents objected to the book and kept to their position, the school might devise some bypass arrangement for their children, but I would not sympathize with their withholding the book from all other pupils. If a substantial proportion of the parents objected to the book, however, it might be appropriate to remove the book as a class assignment. In all cases, it would be appropriate to retain the book in the school library.

The principles just outlined have operational implications for education researchers. The question of whether, how much, and in what contexts media materials affect children's conduct and values is important—as well as complex. It is worthy of careful exploration. Additional and more imaginative research should be conducted to better explore its dimensions better.

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Notes

[1] For the text of the District Court decision re *Ulysses*, *see* James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Random House, 1961), vii–xii.

[2] Frances FitzGerald, "A Reporter at Large: Disagreement at Baileysville," *The New Yorker*, 25 April 1983, 47–90.

[3] Ronald J. Glasser, *365 Days* (New York: Braziller, 1971).

[4] Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968).

[5] Island Pines v. Picco, 457 U.S. 853 (1982).

[6] Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, 157–8.

[7]Madalynne Reuter, "Three City Libraries Refuse Zemach's Book," *Publishers Weekly* 223 (February 18, 1983): 60. *See*, also, "Jake and Honeybunch in Question," *American Libraries* 14 (March 1983): 130–133.

[8]*Library Bill of Rights* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1980).

[9]For a useful general discussion of the issue of children's intellectual limitations, *see* I. A. Snook, ed., *Concepts of Indoctrination* (London: Routledge, Keegan and Paul, 1972), especially Willis Moore, "Indoctrination and the Democratic Method," 93–99.

[10]*See*, for example, David Elkind, *The Hurried Child* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1981); and Vance Packard, *Our Endangered Children* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1983).

[11]For an instance of a study, allegedly based on substantial research which argues on behalf of the "ineffectuality" of pornography, etc., *see* The Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, *Report* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1970).

[12]Michael W. Kirst, "Choosing Textbooks," *American Educator* 9 (Summer 1984): 20.

[13]For a useful discussion of one school library's review and appeal process regarding questioned books, *see* Agnes Stahlschmidt, "A Workable Strategy for Dealing with Censorship," *Phi Delta Kappan* 64 (October 1982): 99–101.

Witness for the Innocent: Children's Literature and the Vietnam War

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> Critical and imaginative works are answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arose. They are not merely answers, they are *strategic* answers, *stylized* answers.
> —Kenneth Burke
> *The Philosophy of Literary Form*[1]

Most accounts of the American past designed for young people invite national pride. Our children learn that they live in a privileged land where there is plenty to eat and drink, and all citizens, regardless of race, class, or gender are provided with opportunities for advancement. Moreover, Americans, they are told, champion the poor and oppressed in other lands by offering financial and military aid. The mythology recounted in our history books bears a close relationship to the stories of success apparent in children's fiction. In kidspeak, we are the "good guys," the breed who instinctively fights for justice and whose worthy intentions are rewarded in victory.

The Vietnam War, however, stands in utter defiance of both a linear, optimistic view of national crises, and the media-manufactured version of success. Despite recent attempts to celebrate the deeds of Vietnam veterans, for parents, grandparents, and teachers of today's school-age children, this war remains too divisive, too visible, and too chronologically close to be tossed lightly in the urn of sentimental consensus history. This paper investigates the stories we tell children about how the U.S. became involved in Vietnam, how and why we lost that war and, most important, what we as a nation have learned from the Southeast Asian experience.

In *Teaching the Vietnam War: A Critical Examination of School Texts and An Interpretative Comparative History Utilizing the Pentagon Papers and Other Documents*, William L. Griffen and John Marciano investigate textbook versions of the Vietnam experience and conclude that schoolbook